



National Geographic travels to Aruba to honor Naomi Vonk

In October the Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) with the assistance of Checkpoint Color conducted a photographic competition amongst island youth ranging in ages from twelve to seventeen. The purpose of the competition was to select a photo to be submitted to the first National Geographic Traveler Caribbean Youth Photo Contest, with the theme being "In My View." The purpose of the competition, according to Kimberly Connaghan, Associate Publisher at National Geographic "was to see the region through the fresh and unique viewpoint of the youth that are growing up in the Caribbean. So many pictures from the different islands are very much the same scenes, at National Geographic we were interested in seeing if the children of the region would capture it differently."

It would appear the twelve-year-old Naomi Vonk of Aruba had that particularly special vision that National Geographic was looking for, and her delightful photo, "Friends Jumping off a Pier" was the Grand Prize winner over 220 entries from the youth of twenty-two island nations that were considerably older than Naomi. "We are thrilled by the number of truly amazing photographs we received by these very talented children," reiterates Kimberly. "We find it especially interesting that the grand prize winner is one of the youngest entrants, it shows that there is a lot of potential there."

Kimberly came to Aruba especially to present Naomi and her family with a mounted enlargement of Naomi's prize winning photo, and to congratulate her and her parents on a job well done. On Tuesday afternoon, in the offices of the ATA she not only presented a beautifully framed rendering of the photo to Naomi and her mother Janine, but father Guido and brother Noah as well. Myrna Jansen, Director of the ATA also accepted an additional copy of the photo, which will have an honored place on the walls of the offices of the ATA, as a gift from National Geographic. "We at the ATA are very happy to have offered this opportunity to Aruba's youth," states Ms. Jansen. "It has provided them a way to take a greater interest in the island's tourism industry, and a chance to exercise creativity. We are very proud of Naomi's accomplishment." As is Naomi's mother, a professional photographer whose photos appear in magazines on a regular basis. Her pride in her daughter as she watched her daughter accept the photo from Kimberly was quite evident.

As Grand Prize winner, Naomi will travel to Washington, D.C. in June with her family for four days and three nights. She will receive a top of the line 35mm SLR Digital Camera, and spend a day in Washington visiting the headquarters of the National Geographic Society and with world-renowned photographer Annie Griffiths Belt, who has been taking pictures for National Geographic for twenty-six years. Annie will spend a day sharing her expertise with young Naomi.

Naomi's photograph will be on display at the National Geographic Society and published in the July/August issue of National Geographic Traveler Magazine along with second and third prize winners, Lauren Korr of Nevis and Daryl Charles from St. Kitts, both seventeen years old. Kimberly Connaghan reports that the editors at National Geographic are so pleased and encouraged by the participation and entries from this first competition, that it will very likely be an annual event. Congratulations Naomi!